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Week of
February 17, 1941

Critics'

THEATRE REVIEWS

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**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play during the week of February 17, 1941.*
†"Popsy" opened Monday, February 10th, at the Playhouse.
†"Out of the Frying Pan" opened Tuesday, February 11th, at the Windsor Theatre.
†"Claudia" opened Wednesday, February 12th, at the Booth Theatre.

THEATRE REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

Critics' Theatre Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York papers

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NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
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NEW YORK JOURNAL AND AMERICAN

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"Claudia"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, *February 13, 1941*

Miss Franken's Claudia a Flawless Production

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

I WAS more deeply touched at last night's premiere of Rose Franken's new play, Claudia, than I have been by any theatrical presentation since the beginning of this season. It was not alone the poignancy of Miss Franken's theme, a poignancy mellowed by a rich and beautiful humor, that made John Golden's new enterprise so stirring, but it was played with such tenderness and understanding, with such sheer artistry, that the warmth and feeling in Miss Franken's story pervaded and filled every corner of the Booth Theater.

If I were to describe Miss Franken's benign drama in terms of its action, you might receive the mistaken impression that there was, after all, very little plot—a distasteful word—in this new work of art. It is merely the story of the coming to maturity of a child-bride, the miraculous metamorphosis from adolescence to womanhood, and her education to the deep tragedies and more profound joys of life. It is, indeed, a study of life and death, written in simple, direct, but compassionate terms.

Miss Franken's characters are vividly alive, and the extraordinarily perfect cast assembled by Mr. Golden seem to give them a fourth dimension—personality and spirituality. The production is flawless.

• • •

There are three milestones in the life of Claudia Naughton, Miss Franken's young heroine, and all of them are passed within the 24 hours encompassed by the drama. The first is her temptation to experiment with the affections of her husband by arousing his jealousy, an experiment that succeeds almost too well and yet is highly satisfactory in its results. The second is her discovery that she is to have a child. The third is the painful, shocking disclosure that her mother, to whom both she and her husband are devoted, is suffering from an incurable illness — that death, for the first time in her conscious life, is soon to make his entrance into the family.

We have then a sudden transition from the inconsequential and muddled, but delightfully gay attitude towards married life, to the mature realization of life's deeper purpose and meaning. And if that meaning is little more than the inescapable conclusion that real spirituality never dies but is merely passed on from one generation to the next, there you have the substance of Miss Franken's philosophy.

Miss Dorothy McGuire, in the role of Claudia, accomplishes this transition in a performance that is happy and bright in its early humor, glowing in its warmth, and deeply stirring in its later emotional passages. It is, to my mind, the most perfect character study I have seen by any player, veteran or youthful, in many months. We have had foretastes of Miss McGuire's superb talent, for it was she who captured the original Martha Scott role in Our Town and carried it on magnificently. But in Claudia,—she—somewhat like the character she portrays—has arrived at acting maturity and the evening is one long triumph for her.

• • •

Donald Cook, who was leading man for Gertrude Lawrence in last year's Skylark, plays the sympathetic husband with such delicacy, understanding and magnetism that he shares equally with Miss McGuire in any bestowal of honors. There were times, I felt, when he was rising even above the limits of Miss Franken's outline, and giving the character a certain body and strength that were his own rather than the author's. There was no artificiality about this performance. It was real.

The third of the principal characters, the mother, was played by Miss Frances Starr, and here again was an example of the Golden skill in casting, for Miss Starr was the perfect embodiment of self-sacrificing—but always sincere, charming and happy—motherhood.

Olga Baclanova gave an engaging performance of an opera star who relieved some of the more sober interludes of the play, and Adrienne Gessner and Frank Tweddell were the sort of couple one would be only too glad to engage to run that house in Connecticut. John Williams contributed heavily to the production as a philandering Englishman, and Miss Audrey Ridgwell was well chosen for a minor role.

Claudia is the most welcome contribution to the Broadway theater since New Year's. I shall be disappointed if it is not one of the season's smashes.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK JOURNAL AND AMERICAN
February 13, 1941

'Claudia' Has Premiere at the Booth

GENTLEMEN in white ties and their bejeweled ladies threw sophistication to the winds last night and stood on their seats at the Booth to cheer a little blond girl named Dorothy McGuire who combined a bit of whimsy with a lot of naivete and much morbidity and somehow made it all seem worth cheering.

Miss McGuire, probably the prettiest of the current Broadway ingenues, took what was undoubtedly her first solo curtain call when the final act of Rose Franken's new play, Claudia, ended. She blushed modestly and rushed from the stage in confusion when the audience shouted in appreciation of her grand performance.

Miss Franken's new play was thunderously received. She evolved a plot from the magazine stories about Claudia and David Naughton that she has written during the past few years, put in some sparkling dialogue and set Miss McGuire to work on it. To judge from the spectators' reaction the result was eminently satisfactory.

• • •

The play is about a young married girl—yes, girl, not woman—who combines a mother fixation with a complete lack of knowledge about the facts of life. It takes the impending death of her mother and the approach of her first child to set her straight on the road to life.

The process of Claudia's growing up provides the auditors with a lot of laughs and just enough pathos to make for a merry evening.

While Miss McGuire is on stage for almost the entire action of the play she is ably supported by a cast of such veterans as Frances Starr, Olga Baclanova, and the handsome Donald Cook, who plays the handsome David, husband to the cute Claudia, with much relish. Many a male in last night's delighted audience seemed to envy Mr. Cook his role.

Adrienne Gessner, Frank Tweddell, John Williams and Audrey Ridgwell played their parts effectively and seemed happy in the belief that their jobs are secure for some time to come.—H. A. S.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
February 13, 1941

A Nice Play For the Ladies

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

IN *Claudia*, I should think, the ladies of our five boroughs have something rather made-to-order for them. This is to define the play rather than disparage it. For though it has limitations and weaknesses, it is a quietly human story, sometimes sunlit, sometimes clouded over; a story which thrusts a touch of emotional reality into the abiding make-believe of the theater.

Claudia is concerned with character rather than plot, telling in a persuasive if not very dramatic fashion the story of a girl's growing up. Claudia Naughton, just a few months married, is engaging and likeable, but flighty and immature. She is still too much tied, in thought and feeling, to her mother; still too volatile and undeveloped as a wife. This is a little her husband's and her mother's fault as well as her own; knowing she is still a child, they tend to treat her like one.

It takes something tragic to make her grow up at last; the news that her mother has not long to live. The knowledge overwhelms Claudia at first, shattering her dream of a happy world that will never be disturbed, never be disrupted; but in the end it deepens her and gives her strength.

Fluid Theme

So slight and fluid a theme is one which the stage, in general half fears and half disdains. For its fears there are legitimate grounds: such a play can all too easily be becalmed. And this is a danger which Miss Franken has not outwitted, in spite of creating a believable heroine, some touching situations, and a good deal of friendly humor. For at many moments the wind altogether dies down and the play stands still, the victim of a story that cannot be stretched across three acts.

But such arrested movement is merely deadening; it is a wind of force movement in *Claudia* that is more damaging. It is one of the limitations of the theater that it can seldom quite truthfully mirror the repose of real life; something "interesting" must happen, something spirited be said. So Miss Franken has hacked out bits of comic and sentimental business, has written "scenes" as well as told a story, has destroyed a mood to get a laugh, has tampered with honest feeling to induce a tighter throat. No doubt it's hard to avoid all this, though the measure of a playwright consists in how well he can. At any rate, despite its false notes and forced touches, much of *Claudia* rings true.

In the title-role Dorothy McGuire not only looked as youthfully charming as she was meant to look, but was human and real. Frances Starr was equally real as the mother, and Donald Cook was well enough as the husband.

"Claudia"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, *February 13, 1941*

Rose Franken's 'Claudia' Is Presented at the Booth Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

ROSE FRANKEN writes of a marriage which is growing up in "Claudia," which was engagingly played last evening at the Booth, and of a girl who is growing up to marriage and to life. Miss Franken writes of these matters gayly and sometimes touchingly and with a rare perception of the tender, comic nuances of the marital relationship. "Claudia" now and then loses itself in irrelevancies, but it is always a charming play.

It is about Claudia, who has been married a year, and her David. Claudia herself is delightfully perceived. She is gay with a quick gayety. She is innocent and oddly wise and insatiably curious. She always listens on the party line and always thinks she shouldn't. She thinks with that kind of glinting logic which seems so illogical to plodding minds, and her speech is so elliptic that only love and experience can guide a male to comprehension. David has the love and is gaining the experience, and their conversations together are swift and darting and greatly puzzle outsiders. The first, and to my mind by far the best act, is all Claudia and David, and Claudia and David are all delight.

Miss Franken felt, and I am not sure wisely, that a play needs more than a long love scene, however affectionately written and tenderly played. So she introduced plot during the second act. She dragged in, it seemed to me somewhat by the heels, a quaint serving couple and showed that Claudia and David did not mind that the man had been in jail for forgery—in jail, it subsequently turned out, to protect his son. Miss Franken also introduced a brief, innocent and experimental love affair between Claudia and a neighbor, entered into by Claudia to prove that she really was attractive to men. This seemed to be merely puzzling, since the whole first act had fully demonstrated that Claudia and David were well adjusted physically as mentally.

With these incidents out of the way, Miss Franken returned to her story, telling how Claudia was slightly obsessed with a "mother image," and how, learning in the same hour that she was to have a child and that her mother was dying, she gained in the same moment freedom and maturity. These scenes are gently touching. If they lack the special quality of the earliest scenes it may be because they are intrinsically more familiar. The gay beginning of a happy marriage, on the other hand, makes an uncommonly fresh picture on the stage, which so often devotes its attention to the sad endings of unhappy ones.

The acting has the charm and perception of the writing. Dorothy McGuire plays the title role lightly, suggesting at once the skimming quality of Claudia's mind and the steadfastness of her emotions. Donald Cook is, as males are in marriages, a little of a foil, but makes David a fine person in his own right.

Frances Starr plays the mother with her unfailing rightness of understanding and intonation and gesture. These three alone have parts of much importance to the play, but all the others—Adrienne Gessner, Frank Tweddell, John Williams, Olga Baclanova and Audrey Ridgwell—are admirable. The play flows smoothly under the author's direction and there is much quiet delight in all of it.

'CLAUDIA'

A play in three acts, by Rose Franken; directed by the author; setting by Donald Oenslager; presented at the Booth Theater on February 12, 1941, by John Golden. The cast:

Mrs. Brown	Frances Starr
David Naughton	Donald Cook
Claudia Naughton	Dorothy McGuire
Bertha	Adrienne Gessner
Fritz	Frank Tweddell
Jerry Seymoure	John Williams
Madame Datruschka	Olga Baclanova
Julia Naughton	Audrey Ridgwell

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, *February 13, 1941*

'Claudia' Brings Rose Franken Back as Author and Introduces Dorothy McGuire as Actress

By BROOKS ATKINSON

AFTER keeping away from the theatre for nine years, Rose Franken has popped back as author of "Claudia," which opened at the Booth last evening. In 1932 she made her theatrical debut as author of "Another Language," which was crowded with characters. "Claudia," which owes something to Miss Franken's recent fiction, is a small, brightly written character portrait of a childlike wife whose attachment for her mother is as strong as the affection she has for her husband.

Although the part is a difficult one it is beautifully played by Dorothy McGuire, who followed Martha Scott in "Our Town" in 1938; and Frances Starr, who is not often in the neighborhood these days, plays the part of the mother with reticence and distinction. As a writer of capriciously humorous dialogue Miss Franken is buoyant and expert. As a writer of pathos she seems to this department to be spuriously gallant. In spite of the many attractive qualities that skip lightly through the pattern of "Claudia," the emotional sequences are a little hard to take. Claudia is a difficult sprite to believe in when she grows serious.

* * *

She is a lucky girl-wife in the beginning. Married to an architect, she is living in the country within commuting range, loyally served by a slightly noble couple and near enough to her mother for an occasional visit. Although she has a delicious sense of humor, she is only partly acquainted with the facts of life. Miss Franken's play chronicles Claudia's coming of age. She is amusingly naive about the footloose male. But the thing that stands most in the way of her maturity is an abnormal attachment for her mother. Breaking this bond involves morning sickness and the familiar prospects on her part and fatal illness on the part of her mother. Every one has to be remarkably brave to make a woman out of Claudia.

When they are being casually humorous, "Claudia" is a complete delight. For Miss Franken has a knack for drawing character by comic indirection. A good deal of the dialogue is sand-bag badinage that nimbly tosses a joke back and forth without crashing into serious obstacles. Claudia is Dulcy and the woman who does not retain very well without losing her sweetness or spontaneity. She is a perfect character for comedy. Miss Franken treats the pathetic scenes in the same casual fashion. They result in considerable laughing through tears. What Miss Franken perhaps intends as human fortitude seems to this theatregoer to be professional sentimentality, and on a much commoner plane than the comedy scenes.

As her own director, Miss Franken has staged "Claudia" with an agreeable pace and beguiling informality, although she has not been able to give much counsel in the art of acting. Miss McGuire still needs a little help there. But for enchantment that is always lively and never cloying she gives a splendid performance of a part that would be irritating if it were played by a dull actress. As the mother, Miss Starr is giving her best performance in years; she is quick-minded, and she draws the character in sharp strokes. Donald Cook plays the husband with charm that is superficial. Olga Baclanova is wonderfully entertaining as a vigorous opera singer. As the wayward male of the neighborhood, John Williams is the quintessence of well-bred philandering. Adrienne Gessner gives a very good performance as the housekeeper, and Frank Tweddel is sufficient unto the part of the houseman.

* * *

In designing a country living room for a rising young architect, Donald Oenslager has spread luxury across the stage in the best of taste on a scale far beyond the means of the taxpayer, which is the usual deception in the modish theatre. "Claudia" is a fairy-story that alternates between comedy and pathos. It is the sort of play that is more palatable in the afternoon than in the evening, when theatregoers are suspected of being more censorious.

"Claudia"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, *February 13, 1941*

John Golden Presents "Claudia" at the Booth

By WILELLA WALDORF

"CLAUDIA," produced by John Golden at the Booth Theatre last night, is Rose Franken's first play since "Another Language." Many of the first-night audience remained after the final curtain to applaud and even cheer, and some of them had tears in their eyes. This reviewer would give a good deal to be able to echo their enthusiasm, and share a few of the tears, but the depressing fact is that, although the company merited its applause, Mrs. Franken's play struck us as an artificial and strangely unmoving affair from beginning to end.

All three acts take place in the living room of the Naughton's country home in Connecticut, some seventy miles from New York City. David and Claudia have been married nearly a year, and while she occasionally gives people the impression that she is his daughter instead of his wife, they seem to get on pretty well considering her mother fixation and the fact that she is under the impression he thinks she has no sex appeal.

Claudia reminded us of a Connecticut Mrs. North who had probably been to see Gertrude Lawrence in "Lady in the Dark" and reacted to the Freudian aspects of that gargantuan work with characteristic confusion. In her cuter moments, Claudia merely found herself in a mess with the bank statement, listening delightedly in on party-line telephone conversations or stuffing herself with home-made bread and jelly. In her less cute, more biological moods, she evinced a marked interest in details of the breeding of stock, an intimate operation being performed on the family cat, and her own feelings on finding she was having a baby.

When the British author who lived nearby suffered a flat tire out front and stayed on a bit while it was changed, he told Claudia that she talked like a bad novel. He was quite right.

Comedy Into Tragedy

The play starts as a comedy and gradually becomes more serious, touching tragedy in the final act. The mother, to whom the girl is sure she is too passionately attached, discovers after a visit to the doctor that she has not long to live. By this means Mrs. Franken puts before her young wife the stern necessity of growing up, of Facing Life for a change, as a woman.

Perhaps this development on Claudia's part might have proved more affecting had we ever been able to feel the tremendous attachment between mother and daughter in the first place. Unfortunately, although the point was stressed a dozen times, a warmer and more genuine affection seemed to exist between the mother and her son-in-law. Doubtless the mother-daughter attachment was something so subtle it eluded us entirely.

Despite the fact that Dorothy McGuire was charming as Claudia, that Donald Cook gave an ingratiating performance as her husband, and that Frances Starr made a good sort of the mother, Mrs. Franken's play moved us not at all. Her characters, well played as they were, remained to the end mere pasteboard puppets set up inside some lovely country house scenery designed by Donald Oenslager.

Among the visitors, John Williams provided several refreshing moments as the British author who decided Claudia did have sex appeal, when dressed up in her sister-in-law's low-cut pajamas, decorated with an opera singer's earrings and doused with perfume. And Olga Baclanova gave us some merry moments as the opera singer herself, who decided suddenly to buy the place for $30,000, chiefly because every opera singer should be photographed now and then among her barn-yard companions.

But of all of them, the only one who ever managed to touch us even faintly was Adrienne Gessner as Bertha, the maid-servant, who had had her share of the world's sorrows and managed to bear up under them. The program says Miss Gessner was one of the most distinguished actresses on the Viennese stage before the advent of Nazism. We haven't a doubt of it.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, *February 13, 1941*

Claudia Grows Up

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

HAVING proved in "Another Language" that she could write a warm and human play, Miss Rose Franken once more demonstrates her gift for honestly moving drama with her new work. There is a forthright emotional quality about her "Claudia" that is deeply touching, and it is deftly mixed with so much natural humor and such sanity of heart and mind that the narrative she has devised about the coming to maturity of the lovely little child bride named Claudia becomes one of the fine things of this in-and-out dramatic season. In addition to the admirable amalgamation of gayety and seriousness that has gone into Miss Franken's play, this latest arrival among the local hits offers some of the most engaging and thoroughly pleasant characters in the recent theater, and it is delightfully played by Miss Dorothy McGuire, Miss Frances Starr, Donald Cook and the rest of a wisely chosen cast.

* * *

Perhaps there will be minor objections that the mood of "Claudia" plunges rather abruptly from the gay and slightly cockeyed humor of the earlier scenes to the deep seriousness of the later acts. The more captious might even complain that the play is likewise given to the sentimental quality of the smile-that-conceals-the-tear. It seems to me, though, that Miss Franken has been highly successful on both scores. The debonair humor of the lighter sections is delightfully managed and the shift comes with such logical directness, as the earnestness of the central theme develops, that the entire management of the changing mood seems to me vastly effective. As for the mood of the smile concealing the broken heart, which is to be found in the emotional parts of "Claudia," I think that it is bravely and movingly handled and that it handsomely achieves honest and touching sincerity and a great deal of rich common sense.

* * *

While the surface story of "Claudia" is slight and fragile, the implications of the narrative are serious enough to give the play strength and forcefulness. In a few words, it is the tale of how Claudia, a naive and thoroughly charming young bride, who is both the delight and the consternation of her understanding husband, came of age under the sorrow that matured her when she discovered that her mother was on the verge of death. For the first time she is brought close to reality and tragedy, just as she finds she is to become a mother, and she stands up gallantly to meet the test that a hitherto pleasant Providence had thrust upon her. It is one of the fine things of the play that the rather too heavy bond that attached the daughter to the mother is never dramatized sensationally or cheaply. It is another virtue that the heroine, whether as ingenuous child or heartbroken woman, is always a delightful heroine.

* * *

Miss McGuire, who had attracted the attention of this eagle-eyed observer in small roles in "Swingin' the Dream" and "Medicine Show," makes Claudia an enchanting young woman. It is one of Miss McGuire's achievements that, even in her scenes of almost nitwit comedy, she always convinces you that the girl of the narrative is decidedly worth bothering about. Mr. Cook plays the young husband with fine understanding and genuine feeling, adding greatly to the effectiveness of the play. I would set down David and Claudia Naughton as the most attractive young couple of the season. Miss Starr is sane, knowing and straightforwardly moving as the mother. In a shorter role John Williams is first-rate as a somewhat amorous neighbor who is completely confused by Claudia's innocent enticement, and there is admirable work by Miss Adrienne Gessner and Frank Tweddell as two loyal servants with doubtful pasts. Miss Olga Baclanova and Miss Audrey Ridgwell are hopeful in smaller and less interesting roles. "Claudia" is one of the delights of the year.

"Claudia"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *February 13, 1941*

"Claudia" a Pleasant Comedy About Young Wife's First Tragedy

"Claudia," comedy by Rose Franken. Produced by John Golden at the Booth Theatre, New York, Feb. 12, 1941.

★ ★ ★–

By BURNS MANTLE

OF COURSE there is a pronounced difference between silly young wives on the stage and silly young wives living in Westchester County, or on Long Island, or even in New Jersey.

On the stage they usually are immersed in a kind of protective charm, whereas in other locations they are merely irritating.

This is true of the heroine of Rose Franken's "Claudia," who moved into the Booth Theatre last night. An almost unbelievably naive child, eight months married and still wondering about life, this Chudia is wide-eyed, blandly trusting and abnormally venturesome through the experience of a single week-end.

Her patient young husband is hoping that soon she will grow up. Her understanding mother is afraid she never will. And then, suddenly, Claudia comes face to face with the beginning and the end—the miracle of birth and the mystery of death.

She knows that she is going to have a baby. And she knows that her mother is dying of an incurable cancer.

Deft But Delayed

It seems to me that Mrs. Franken's treatment of this situation is deft but much too leisurely. "Claudia" cries out for less talk, however true, and more drama, even though it were artificially contrived.

A partly developed lead in which a friendly house man is known to have a lightly criminal past might have furnished it. Or a casual investigation of sex impulses begun with the young Britisher on the next farm. Or the further complication of a real estate deal that nearly sweeps Claudia's home out from under her.

But what we get the last half of the play is no more than a lightly pathetic discussion of Claudia's misery, of her gradual acceptance of life on its own terms and, at the end, of her moving determination to carry on.

Before that, however, there has been an act and a half of sprightly characterization and splendid dialogue. These are likable and literate humans living in attractive surroundings and living interesting lives.

The Naughtons have bought a farm in the country. David, the husband, being a farmer by heritage, loves it. Claudia, being a mamma's girl by instinct, had rather live in town nearer mamma. Claudia also worries considerably about her sex appeal, or lack of it. She tries it on a willing neighbor and learns quite a bit.

Farm and Sex

"Claudia" is a more rambling study of human nature than was Mrs. Franken's first hit, "Another Language," but is written with much the same insight into human reactions and the same affection for naturalistic expression.

The performances are excellent. Frances Starr passes intermittently through the drama with fine authority. Dorothy McGuire makes the slightly incredible Claudia adorably casual and appealingly feminine. Donald Cook plays the husband as the best young leading man of his day should play it.

There are good short parts for John Williams as the investigating Britisher and Olga Baclanova as a chirrupy singer. These light up one or two scenes. Frank Tweddell, Adrienne Gessner and Audrey Ridgwell fill in nicely.

They are all housed in a lovely country house set Donald Oenslager might have some difficulty building the rest of a house around, but it serves Producer Golden's purpose admirably. Last night's audience was most appreciative.

"Out of the Frying Pan"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, *February 12, 1941*

'Out of the Frying Pan,' a Farce, Opens at the Windsor Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

IF YOU can believe for a moment in "Out of the Frying Pan," which was attractively acted at the Windsor last evening, you can have a right good time at it and laugh gayly at the antics and farcical adventures of half a dozen young actors living helter-skelter in a little apartment. Even if, like this correspondent, such belief is beyond you, you may still laugh. But then your laughter will have the evanescence of a puff of steam and you will find yourself, a moment later, wondering why it came and where it went.

This is a somewhat oblique approach to a far-fetched little farce about some young actors living in an economical huddle. According to Francis Swann, the author, they had a mad, hilarious time. The solvent member, an attractive half-wit, had a father who threatened to take her home. He had to be kept from finding out that there were three boy actors and three girl actors in the menage. There was a producer living downstairs, where he brewed gumbos with an epicure's gloomy concentration, and he had to be brought upstairs to see the children act. They acted in their own version of a burlesque called "Mostly Murder," which the producer was at that moment producing. The second act of "Out of the Frying Pan" is devoted to a burlesque of this burlesque, and if any one thinks that "Arsenic and Old Lace" is being intentionally k i d d e d he probably is wrong.

At much of this you may laugh as if you had just been tickled, even while not believing a word of it. And afterward you will wonder how you happened to, because very little of "Out of the Frying Pan" seems at all funny in retrospect. A great deal of it, I must confess, didn't seem as funny to me at the time as it evidently did to almost everybody else. Much of it just seemed silly. Even farce should convince one of its reality for, at any rate, the brief moment of its occurrence. "Out of the Frying Pan" doesn't.

Most of the members of the cast are very beguiling young people. Miss Barbara Bel Geddes has a voice which would make the Gettysburg Address sound like baby talk, but she is fun in spite of this. Florence MacMichael, by an odd coincidence, talks in almost precisely the same fashion and makes the role of a stray young woman who is accidentally engulfed in the turmoil very comical indeed. William W. Terry, Alfred Drake, Nancy Douglass, Louise Snyder and Sellwyn Myers are also attractive youngsters and pleasant actors, and among the elders in the cast Henry Antrim, Reynolds Evans and Mabel Paige play amusingly.

You may enjoy "Out of the Frying Pan" if you don't think it too foolish. I'm afraid I do think it too foolish.

'OUT OF THE FRYING PAN'

A comedy in three acts by Francis Swann; staged by Alexander Kirkland; presented at the Windsor Theater on February 11, 1941, by William Deering and Mr. Kirkland. The cast:

George Bodell	William W. Terry
Mrs. Garnet	Mabel Paige
Norman Reese	Alfred Drake
Muriel Foster	Florence MacMichael
Kate Ault	Nancy Douglass
Marge Benson	Louise Snyder
Tony Dennisor	Sellwyn Myers
Dottie Coburn	Barbara Bel Geddes
Mr. Coburn	Henry Antrim
Mr. Kenny	Reynolds Evans
Mac	Arthur Holland
Joe	George Mathews

"Out of the Frying Pan"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, *February 12, 1941*

Out of the Frying Pan a Gay Bit of Nonsense

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

THERE is something infectious about the enthusiasm of a group of young and earnest actors in Francis Swann's new farce, Out of the Frying Pan, that eventually communicates itself to an audience, and because of that I am inclined to regard the play as a gay bit of nonsense that, all things considered, makes an agreeable evening in the theater.

As a play it is not as taut nor as methodically constructed as it should be. There are certain repetitious scenes in the second act that might be cut or eliminated entirely without much harm. But it has life and vivacity, several amusing situations and a youthful swing to it—particularly in its last act—that should put the playgoer in a mellow mood.

Mr. Swann's play is based on the inevitable results that would follow upon three young men and three young women sharing the same apartment, in all innocence, if they were driven into such a Communistic enterprise by economic circumstances. There is nothing novel about this idea, but because the six young people are aspiring actors and actresses, because they are struggling with comic desperation against the customary troubles that beset such good folk and because they take their troubles so lightly and friskily, one is inclined to forgive and forget the fact that the theme is familiar.

The six nice boys and girls have, it seems, taken the apartment because they hope to waylay a certain producer, who lives downstairs, and so impress him with their talent that he will swoon with delight and hand them all contracts the moment he regains his senses. Their plans begin to fall to pieces the moment a snippy young friend of one of the girls enters the picture and threatens to tell her daddy that she is living in sin. Their staging of a murder scene, for the benefit of the producer, is so realistic that the police swarm into the place, and the misunderstanding becomes hilarious when it is discovered that a girl who is playing the part of a corpse has been doped by mickey finn.

All the troubles vanish happily in the third act, of course, all the Equity dues and even the landlady are paid, the producer comes through with the contracts and the curtain descends upon squeals of delight.

Out of the Frying Pan needs tightening up. Mr. Swann's lines are bright and cheerful, with plenty of allusions to Broadway figures to make them realistic. And an excellent cast do their utmost to put zip into the production.

Last night's opening marked the debut, for instance, of Barbara Bel Geddes, daughter of Norman Bel Geddes, who played the role of a young nit-wit from Boston in an utterly charming and disarming manner. She is a chubbily attractive young girl, with undoubted talent for comedy.

* * *

Alfred Drake, to my mind one of the most talented of our younger comedians, you may remember him in One for the Money and Two for the Show, gives another demonstration of fine theatrical understanding as the ringleader of the unfortunate sextet. Florence MacMichael, also making her professional debut, contributes considerable bright comedy, and William W. Terry, Nancy Douglass, Louise Snyder, Sellwyn Myers help immensely to create a bright performance. The veteran Mable Paige is delightful as the landlady, and Reynolds Evans is properly cast as the outraged father.

Out of the Frying Pan is so much more genial than the run-of-mine comedies from which we have recently suffered, that, while it is by no means in a class with the top-flight hits, one is inclined to be gentle and even friendly toward it.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
February 12, 1941

Too Many Giggles, Too Few Laughs

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

COMING on the heels of *Boudoir* and *Popsy*, *Out of the Frying Pan* seems almost vernal. It's like meeting a silly, giggly young girl after a day in the company of two prison matrons. At least she's young and high-spirited and has a good complexion. But her giggle, in the end, is hard to take.

Mr. Swann's play is one of those romps through Bedlam that never quite come off. It's a broken-egg and split-milk version of *My Sister Eileen*, in which what's meant to be fun too often turns out to be noise, and what is fun somehow evaporates while you think it's still there. It has funny moments, even one or two funny scenes. But much of it is inexpert and more just silly.

It's the story of a bunch of kids who've come to New York to get on the stage. They haven't any money and all six of them, boys and girls alike, share a small apartment in giddy but immaculate bohemianism. Below them lives a producer they are dying to meet and finally do, by flooding his place with their bath water. The bath water is quickly followed up with landladies, knives, Mickey Finns, cops, enraged parents, strange young girls and anything else that will stir up a breeze.

The trouble is, there's too much breeze from a fan and not enough that blows freshly in through the window. There's too much running around in circles and beating the sides of a dead horse. Kids have dashed about in bathrobes and shorts, and shot wildly at the moon, in so many plays, that it's hard to succeed at them nowadays. Mr. Swann hasn't succeeded. He has merely failed in a likable way.

A youthful cast gave a good account of itself. Norman Bel Geddes's daughter Barbara makes a pleasant dumbbell, and Alfred Drake shows once more that he is talented. But first honors go to a newcomer named Florence MacMichael who, with a squeaky voice and the look of a sullen nitwit, was (to use the simplest and most accurate phrase) extremely funny.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK TIMES,
February 12, 1941

'Out of the Frying Pan' Is a Farce About Six Young Actors Looking for Jobs

By BROOKS ATKINSON

TO HAVE heard the audience roaring at the Windsor last evening you would have thought that "Hellz-a-poppin" had been crossed with "You Can't Take It With You" and betrothed to "Charley's Aunt." For "Out of the Frying Pan," by Francis Swann, is a piece of vertigo about young actors who are trying to keep body and soul together in a barren apartment and to get jobs on Broadway. And since most of the parts are for young actors, the cast is composed chiefly of actors of just about that indeterminate age, including Florence MacMichael and Barbara Bel Geddes, who are making their Broadway debuts with high and piping voices. On the whole, this department felt as though it were attending the senior play at a school of the dramatic arts.

* * *

For "Out of the Frying Pan" is farce, written wthout logic, and directed at top speed without much invention or skill. Six young actors, three of each sex, are living in a brownstone front apartment directly above a Broadway producer who fancies himself as an amateur chef. Having pulled up the steampipes, they can peek down into his apartment and see what he is doing. Two things absorb most of their attention. In the first place, they are trying to convince the father of one of the actresses that she is living a decent life. In the second place, they are trying to persuade the producer to come upstairs and see them run through their performances of his play. These two urgent matters keep the young people of "Out of the Frying Pan" slamming doors and mugging throughout the evening. It also compels them to try very hard not to laugh at the jokes they are acting.

* * *

Every one knows that all theatre people are insane. That is the foundation of the profession. Some people go so far as to say that "Out of the Frying Pan" is a satire on the Stanislavsky earnestness of the Group Theatre mummers, although the management denies it. What it is really is an amateur farce that tortures its way into laugh situations without much rhyme or reason. If you are the sort of a person who likes to believe in the logic of a farce story, you will find the humor of "Out of the Frying Pan" overburdened by the effort needed to hurl it on the stage.

* * *

Alexander Kirkland has staged it with the rough-and-ready drive of a Summer theatre performance. Among the young actors, Alfred Drake is the ablest. He can enjoy fantastification without being fantastic himself. But Miss MacMichael is a naturally funny character drudge with a whining voice and a lisp. After beginning the evening like a nitwit, she comes through the storm like Pocahontas with a headache in the last act, and is continuously amusing. Norman Bel Geddes's plump and blonde daughter is still in the apprentice stage of histrionics. William W. Terry is a good-natured juvenile and Sellwyn Myers is also an actor. As a friendly landlady, Mabel Paige is a good sort of experienced actress to have around in a crisis like this, and Reynolds Evans, the Shakespearean, is lethargic enough to represent a discouraged producer plausibly.

"Out of the Frying Pan" is a synthetic farce at which the first-night audience laughed excessively.

"Out of the Frying Pan"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *February 12, 1941*

"Out of the Frying Pan" Comedy Of Youth With a Broadway Urge

"Out of the Frying Pan," comedy by Francis Swann. Produced by William Deering and Alexander Kirkland at the Windsor Theatre, New York, Feb. 11, 1941.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

THE young people—the strange young people, I was going to say, though they are strange only in the sense that none of them is well known in the Broadway theatre—the young people who have brought "Out of the Frying Pan" to the Windsor theatre have reason to feel at least modestly encouraged.

Theirs is a comedy farce of the "Charley's Aunt" order, and this is tea in a silk hat, and tying one man's garter to another man's leg can toss howling audiences into the aisles, as happens in the forty-eight-year-old revival at the Court, then the rehearsal of a burlesque murder mystery, with comical interruptions, should also do business at the Windsor.

"Out of the Frying Pan" tells of the wacky plan of six ambitious and idle young actors to attract the attention of a Broadway play producer.

They rent the apartment above his, rehearse a scene from his current murder mystery and scheme to get him upstairs to see it.

The fact that they are three young men and three young women, living in platonic friendliness in their apartment, gives a Greenwich Village turn and adds zest to the adventure.

The fact that their amiable landlady is always after the rent emphasizes the comparison.

The further fact that a couple of them are dim wits, stupidly given to exploding crucial situations, provides excuse for much of the laughter, which last night was frequently spontaneous and hearty.

The play producer eludes the actors until he runs out of flour during his preparation of an experimental gumbo. He is such an ardent devotee of the culinary art that his membership in the Friends of Escoffier is of greater importance to him than his managerial prejudices.

The actors loan him the flour, show him their show, despite police interference and this is the beginning of what promises to be a profitable friendship.

In the cast is Barbara Bel Geddes, an attractive young 18-year-old with a natural gift for baby-talk comedy that, when she finds the proper part, will take her a long way toward stage success. In the audience last night sat Papa Bel Geddes, tossing self-consciousness nonchalantly aside and, I suspect, expanding inwardly with paternal pride. As he should.

Florence MacMichael, playing a comic intruder, is another who has come quickly from the amateur ranks because of a natural talent for character comedy.

Several of the others are players of experience of limited opportunities. Alfred Drake who leads the younger contingent, has worked successfully in radio drama and sings well enough to have made the semi-finals in a Metropolitan opera audition.

Mabel Paige, playing the landlady; Reynolds Evans, the producer, and Henry Antrim, a worried father, are the veterans of the cast.

Alexander Kirkland did the staging with good farce sense and the set was evidently salvaged for the experiment. A friendly audience, as noted, started the young people off with noisy encouragement.

Francis Swann wrote "Out of the Frying Pan." It is a first play and was successfully tried down Baltimore way last Summer.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, *February 12, 1941*

"Out of the Frying Pan" Opens at the Windsor

By WILELLA WALDORF

ONE of the surprises of the current theatrical season occurred last night at the Windsor Theatre when an unpretentious, unheralded comedy called "Out of the Frying Pan," written by an unknown author, and acted for the most part by young players of meager experience, proved to be one of the merriest Broadway events in weeks.

The author, Francis Swann, is said to have confessed during rehealsals that the play is more or less autobiographical, and that may very well be so, for although much of what goes on falls into the realm of crackpot farce, it has an underlying ring of truth that makes it human as well as amusing.

Six aspiring actors, three young men and three young women, have moved into a flat in one of those brownstone fronts on the West Side and are living in a perfectly moral, though somewhat unconventional, fashion hoping for the return of Mr. Kenny, the Broadway producer who occupies the floor below. Five of them pay what little they manage to earn toward the upkeep of the menage, but most of the financial burden is carried by Dottie Coburn, a dumb Dora from Boston whose father is a politician and theatrical censor in that city.

A Producer Who Cooks

After going the rounds of the managers' offices for weeks, they know all the dodges producers' office girls use to get rid of actors out of jobs. In the hope of getting Mr. Kenny interested, they are rehearsing his current mystery satire just to show the great man what they can do.

Mr. Kenny, when he finally returns, proves to be a connoisseur of food, a passionate experimental cook, far more interested in creating a culinary masterpiece than in listening to inexperienced actors, but they capture him at last, and the agonies of trying to give a play under disheartening conditions take up the second act. Plenty of complications have previously arisen through an unexpected visit from Dottie's Boston daddy, various misunderstandings with the landlady, and the fact that Tony and Marge are secretly married and Marge is going to have a baby.

Plays a Corpse

Probably the loudest laughs were garnered last night by Florence MacMichael as Muriel Foster, a school friend of Dottie's who drops in at the worst possible moments, and thinks everybody in the place is crazy. Her performance as the corpse in the play is particularly hilarious, but her piping voice and general air of dejected bewilderment when faced with the theatrical profession at its most rampant are unfailingly comic.

As the disciple of Stanislavsky who improvises on any provocation, Alfred Drake, whose baritone has been heard to advantage in a number of Broadway musical shows, proves here that he's as good at acting as he is at singing, and dumb Dottie is amusingly played by Barbara Bel Geddes, daughter of designer Norman Bel Geddes, who, at eighteen, is making her local stage debut.

William W. Terry, Sellwyn Myers, Nancy Douglass and Louise Snyder, all young people storming the heights of Broadway after plugging away at stock here and there, are pleasant and competent, Henry Antrim makes a plausible Boston father, and Mabel Paige has some rare moments as the landlady who never knows whether a play is going on or not.

Especially must be mentioned Reynolds Evans, an actor hitherto distinguished in Shakespearean roles, who is just about perfect as the producer more interested in cookery than in the theatre.

Alexander Kirkland has done a first-rate job of direction, aided, we understand, unofficially, by that old master, Arthur Hopkins.

Reason for Joining Equity

"The characters and events in this play are purely imaginary," states the program, "and anyone claiming resemblance or similarity ought to be ashamed to admit it."

The theatrical chatter is full of references to real people and places, from the Group Theatre and George Abbott to Whelan's Drug Store. On the whole, our favorite quip was the one following Dottie's father's discovery that his daughter had become a member of the Actors' Equity Association at a cost of $100.

"What good does it do her?" he wanted to know.

"She gets a magazine," was the reply.

"Out of the Frying Pan"

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, *February 12, 1941*

Stage-Struck Youth

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

THERE is a disarming quality about "Out of the Frying Pan" which makes one want to be friendly toward it. A modest little comedy about the trials and tribulations of stage-struck youth striving for recognition from hard-boiled theatrical producers, the new play by Francis Swann suggests something of the indomitable gallantry of spirit that can so frequently inspire the ambitious youngsters who are the hope of the theater's future. To this extent "Out of the Frying Pan" possesses a decidedly appealing quality. It can be very funny, too, upon occasion, and some of it manages to achieve a pleasant hilarity. The only trouble is that the comedy is even more often of a ramshackle nature, without much guile or deftness, and, while this naivete can sometimes be winning, it can also make for mere futility. In addition, the characters frequently behave so foolishly that you cannot even believe them as starry-eyed incipient actors.

* * *

Slightly idiotic behavior can often be helpful to the action of a studiously madcap farce, but, in the case of "Out of the Frying Pan," it has a way of destroying the credible humanity that is so important a part of Mr. Swann's play. The point of the new work is that its young people are so engagingly and recognizably drawn that their activities in their daffy efforts to capture jobs become as human as they are amusing. When these characters behave too much like nitwits and you encounter situations which could have ended minutes earlier if any one had behaved with even a show of intelligence, the necessary humanity is for the time being destroyed. "Out of the Frying Pan" is the story of the three boys and three girls who lived together platonically while looking for work in the theater; of their efforts to attract the attention of the producer who lived downstairs, and of their attempts to keep from being thrown out of their living quarters. It is naive and it is often incompetent as playwriting. But it can be fun.

* * *

The acting is as engaging as the better parts of the play. There is something inherently appealing in the sight of young actors and actresses striving for a position in the theater playing young actors and actresses who are, for the purposes of the plot, in the same situation. Although I suspect it is a mistake to have two girl comics with high-pitched, squeaky voices on one stage, the Misses Florence MacMichael and Barbara Bel Geddes are both effective and likable. In fact, there are moments when Miss MacMichael, as a sort of innocent bystander enmeshed in the quest for jobs, rather runs away with the show. The other players are helpful also, and that is only in part because they are so well cast. I suppose that the night after "Popsy" almost anything would seem approximately a masterpiece. "Oue of the Frying Pan" is far from that. It isn't even a very good play. But there are times when it has an agreeable way of looking almost like one.

Reprinted from NEW YORK JOURNAL AND AMERICAN, *February 12, 1941*

'Out of the Frying Pan'

Opens at the Windsor

"OUT OF THE FRYING PAN" and onto the stage of the Windsor Theatre last night jumped a group of young theatre folk in a screwball comedy of that name.

It kept an appreciative audience laughing almost continuosly both for its sheer artlessness and humorous situations.

A sample of purposeful ingenuousness not on stage is the tag line of the program which reads "the characters and events in this play are purely imaginary and anyone claiming resemblance or similarity ought to be ashamed to admit it.

The play is wound around the lives of six struggling young actors, three of each sex, who are trying to break into the theatre. They live together on hamburgers in a brownstone apartment where the rent is forever due. Beneath them lives a producer whom they are trying to trap into giving them jobs.

* * *

Dottie, the youngest of the tyro actresses, is the daughter of a Boston politician who doesn't know the moral precariousness of her existence until a dumb bunny niece pops in to pay a call.

The sextette meanwhile rehearses a murder play which the producer currently has on Broadway in the hope they can entice him into seeing their thespian qualities.

Continuous interruptions by the landlady, Dottie's father and a variety of other hindrances create a number of funny situations.

The high spots of the comedy are the improvisations of the young actor Norman Reese and the producer and the witlessness of the niece, Dottie and the landlady.

* * *

Alfred Drake, as Norman, who will be remembered for his singing and dancing in several musicals, gives another demonstration of his versatility.

Florence Mac Michael, as the niece, gives an applause-stirring exhibition as the obtuse niece. It is her professional theatre debut.

Barbara Bel Geddes, daughter of Norman Bel Geddes, the designer, makes her first Broadway appearance at 18, and does a creditable job as Dottie.

Henry Antrim, playing Dottie's father; Louise Snyder, Sellwyn Myers, Nancy Douglass, Reynolds Evans and William Terry fit well in the supporting roles.—L. R.

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Critics'

Theatre Reviews

"Popsy"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, *February 11, 1941*

'Popsy,' Humdrum Comedy, Is Offered at the Playhouse

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

THE amiable Al Shean is in "Popsy," which opened a little at the Playhouse last evening, and Mr. Shean does everything any one could ask and possibly a little bit more. He appears once in long winter underwear, which is any actor's last full measure of devotion, and he scampers about the stage as if he were a boy again. If nothing comes of "Popsy" it is certainly not Mr. Shean's fault.

It is the fault, primarily, of Fred Herendeen, who committed "Popsy" to paper. It is also, since there is blame enough to go around, a little the fault of Rowland G. Edwards, who staged the meandering action in as humdrum a fashion as can readily be imagined and lured from retirement some heavily bearded gags. Mr. Herendeen and Mr. Edwards, conspiring together, have achieved a basic dullness against which even Mr. Shean is powerless.

The story is about a mathematics professor of Madison, Wisconsin, who has dreamed all of his life of going to Hawaii and writing a book. He is about ready to go when his youngest daughter breaks her engagement, his oldest daughter comes home with her two children and a grudge against her husband and his middle daughter returns from Detroit full of self-sacrifice and the conviction that she had better leave her husband for his own good. The dear old professor and his equally dear old wife then give up Hawaii. Even when all the daughters return to their men in as unsurprising a series of reconciliations as I can remember having seen on any stage, the old couple don't go to Hawaii. Seems they didn't want to much, anyway.

Mr. Herendeen's writing is ever so folksy. It is also ever so routine and colorless. Against writing of this sort actors are powerless and can only go through the motions. Mr. Shean and the other members of the cast go through the motions unsparingly.

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *February 11, 1941*

"Popsy" on the Dull Side as a Comedy About Dull Family

"Popsy," comedy by Fred Herendeen. Produced by Hammerstein, Du For and Skelly at the Playhouse, New York, Feb. 10, 1941.

★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

IN "Popsy" they are well meaning folk, but frightfully dull. And, as we have written in this space before, the ancient trick of turning out bricks without straw should be an easy chore compared with that of writing a bright comedy about dull people telling a trite story.

It was Fred Herendeen's idea, Fred being the author involved, to write a lightly amusing piece about a likable professor who had looked forward for years to the time his family would be settled and self-supporting so he could retire and write a book.

No Appeal

The ambition in its implications is common enough to give it some appeal, but Mr. Herendeen has missed it. His professor is likable enough but he is no more than likable, having nether wit nor character.

After he has bought his tickets for a trip to the Hawaiian Islands, sold his house and given up his job his three daughters turn back on him. One because she quarrels with her fiance. One because she has failed to give her husband children and is chagrined. One because her husband neglects her.

So "Popsy" gives up his trip and goes to sleep on the living room sofa in his underdrawers.

This appeared to be the high point of humor with last night's audience at the Playhouse.

Nothing else happens. The engaged couple makes up, the barren wife discovers that she is pregnant and the neglectful husband acquires a new disposition with a job in South America.

Barn Beginnings

"Popsy" was tried in the Summer theatres as "Home Sweet Home." Herbert Yost played the professor at that time. Last night Al Shean, an able comedian when he has anything to work with, tried to pep up the role without success.

His supporting players included such experienced players as Edith King, Sylvia Field, Nancy Evans, Eva Condon, Robert Harrison and Robert Allen, but the going was too heavy for them.

Also for a couple of youngsters, Natalie Thompson, a pretty girl from the Coast, and Herbert Evers, breaking in as a juvenile. And much too heavy for Rowland Edwards, director.

Only Tom Adrian Cracraft, who designed the pleasant interior, gave the play any lift.

'POPSY'

A comedy in three acts by Fred Herendeen; staged by Rowland G. Edwards; setting by Tom Adrian Cracraft; presented at the Playhouse on February 10, 1941, by Theodore Hammerstein and Denis Du-For, in association with Hugh Skelly. The cast:

Nancy.....Eva Condon
Mortimer.....Raymond Cape
Prof. Henry Tibbs.....Al Shean
Mary Tibbs.....Edith King
Jane Tibbs.....Natalie Thompson
Jed Prout.....John Adair
Bob Hatch.....Herbert Evers
Dr. Thomas Lorett.....Robert Harrison
Florence Tibbs Benson.....Sylvia Field
Marie Antoinette Benson
Joyce Van Patten
Henry Wadsworth Benson
Lachland Campbell
Ruth Tibbs Brown.....Nancy Evans
Western Union Messenger..Judson Pratt
Thaddeus T. Burns.....Percy Helton
Dr. Mac.....John McKee
William Brown.....Robert Allen

Reprinted from
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
February 11, 1941

Question Bee

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

IF, by any perverse chance, you want to find the stage's dullest family in the season's dullest and most inept play, "Popsy" is your destination. It is all about a tedious old professor of mathematics, who wants to retire and go to Hawaii. Then his idiotic daughters get in various marital and romantic jams, and, after their affairs are straightened out, the ancient dotard decides he would rather go to Niagara Falls. During the course of these fascinating proceedings, the dialogue includes such gems as (1) "That fellow could sell electric fans to the Eskimos" and (2) "I have a date with a man about a dog." Thus do the players sparkle on, act after act.

* * *

Should the fates be against you and you find yourself trapped at "Popsy," I would suggest that you seek comparative solace by mulling over a quartet of questions concerned with this latest contribution to the sorely tried dramatic season. If "Popsy" can manage to get produced, what is the quality of the plays that are rated too incompetent for Broadway presentation? If "Popsy" reaches New York, how bad are the dramas that are tried out elsewhere and fold before they arrive in Manhattan? How far back was the cause of the living theater set in Allentown, Pa., when "Popsy" had its trial engagement there? How many years ago in the so-called golden age of the local drama was a comedy equivalent in incompetence to "Popsy" last presented? For the best reply to these queries I offer two seats for any performance of the Chicago company of "Popsy."

* * *

It is sad to think that two players of repute are wasting their time in this hapless antique. Al Shean, of the celebrated team of Gallagher and Shean, a splendid veteran who was fine as the old priest in "Father Malachy's Miracle," is bogged down by a witless narrative, and Miss Sylvia Field, whom some of us will always remember as the heroine of "Broadway," is lost as one of the inane daughters. There is the possibility that some of the other players found approximately their level in this little narrative. In the third act there is some talk about one of the characters arriving by airplane. But I am suspicious. I'll bet that "Popsy" was written some time before the coming of the Wright brothers' folly and that the airplane scene was added just to fool us.

"Popsy"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, *February 11, 1941*

"Popsy," Described as a Comedy, at the Playhouse

By WILELLA WALDORF

MADISON, Wisconsin, is a university town, presumably a center of learning and culture. What Fred Herendeen has against it, we don't know, but he has made it the scene of his play, "Popsy," produced last night at the Playhouse. "Popsy" is described as an American comedy, and if only one producer were involved it might be easier to understand how it ever managed to reach a Broadway stage. With some effort, it is possible to imagine one producer thinking "Popsy" worth doing, but that two other producers should share the opinion is almost fantastic. Yet there they stand, three producers, names clearly printed in the program.

Professor Tibbs of the mathematics department has resigned after 32 years of teaching and proposes to take his wife to one of the Hawaiian islands while he writes a book. Whereupon their two married daughters descend upon them, both having left their husbands, and the third daughter, who is about to marry an ex-football player, has a tiff with her fiance over what color the wall paper shall be in their bedroom. In the end, naturally, all three girls are reunited with their respective mates, and mother and father decide not to go to Hawaii after all.

It is amazing how long and how tediously Mr. Herendeen is able to spin out this frail, dreary little plot. His idea of a laugh line is to have somebody mispronounce an ordinary six or seven letter word, and a big climactic moment occurs whenever the doorbell and the telephone bell ring at the same time.

Almost the entire first act is given over to conversations in which members of the family tell one another in detail what they all know perfectly well already, for the benefit of the audience. Anybody who was ever exposed to the most elementary course in Drama at the University of Wisconsin could inform Mr. Herendeen that exposure ought to be somewhat more cleverly managed, but then, if it comes to that, anybody with next to no schooling at all could easily have broken the news that "Popsy" is no play, merely a compendium of old family jokes and vapid chatter.

Al Shean, in the title role, endeavored throughout the evening to pull out a laugh or two by making faces at the audience and appearing in his long, winter underwear, but even Barry Fitzgerald, adept as he is at face making and turning up half-dressed, would have had his troubles with "Popsy."

Two cute children, Joyce Van Patten and Lachland Campbell, tore around the stage from time to time and Sylvia Field, playing their mother, walked through now and then with a frown on her face. How actors can keep their minds on dialogue such as this, has long been a major mystery.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
February 11, 1941

Give Me Back That Booby Prize

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

I HATE to be an Indian giver, but two days ago I impulsively gave the season's booby prize to a work called *Boudoir*, and now I must ask for it back. But this time I feel sure I can award it for good and all. If anything worse than *Popsy* appears, please let us close the theaters, turn down the lights on Broadway, and stay home o'nights for a game of hunt the slipper.

I'm afraid there is simply no way of being accurate about *Popsy* without being brutal. It's a comedy that never gets started and yet never seems to end. There is no use examining the plot. I can better describe the play as something that breaks all known records for the number of times the telephone rings, the doorbell sounds and the staircase is in use. Or as something that contains a comic maid, two insupportable stage children, a painfully recurrent real estate agent, an expectant father, and a Fuller Brush man whose demonstration of his wares lasts eight and a half minutes.

Al Shean (once of Gallagher and Shean) has the chief role, poor man.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, *February 11, 1941*

Al Shean Featured in Herendeen's Comedy, Popsy

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

POPSY, called "an American comedy" by its author, Fred Herendeen, has the venerable Al Shean as its featured player, but I am sorry to say that all Mr. Shean's antics, his grimaces, his coyness and his accumulation of comic stage business that used to make him such a delightful companion to the late Mr. Gallagher cannot make the new play live up to the author's promise. It is the saddest comedy of the year.

Essentially there may be a human and perhaps a touching story behind the professor of mathematics who has always dreamed of quitting his post in the mid-Western university and going to some far-away island to write a book, and by the frustration of his dream when three daughters in an epidemic of husband trouble come home all at once and settle down on the old man like a bevy of millstones. Mr. Herendeen's writing eliminates the human angle, and an amateurish and poorly directed cast wipe out anything that might have been touching.

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Mr. Herendeen's sense of humor seems to be of the type that will never let go of a joke. I mean that having seen or heard a good one some 10 or 15 years ago, he feels forced to embalm it forever in his play.

Most of the lines and, indeed, the situations are artificial contrivances, like the one cited above, that are so deficient in the qualities of novelty, or even reality that Mr. Shean is himself forced (I assume) to make a brave attempt to carry the burden of comedy by himself. So he trots around the stage in long woolen underwear and trips on rugs and gets tangled up while folding sheets in order to create the laughs that, sad to relate, rarely come.

The others in a rather large cast struggle feebly against odds that were heavily opposed to them from the very first colloquy between the cook and the postman to the final curtain. A number of the younger members seem to have devoted their time to radio and movie appearances, which may account for considerable of the overacting, although I doubt that the Lunts, Maurice Evans and Katherine Cornell, combined, could have made Popsy into an agreeable evening's entertainment.

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The most interesting and perhaps the most adept actors in the company were, in fact, two youngsters named Joyce Van Patten and Lachland Campbell. Neither Miss Van Patten nor Mr. Campbell is yet 10 years old, and it may be that, because of their tender years, they could not comprehend the banality of Mr. Herendeen's conversation and, hence, were not as self-conscious as their elders.

Why producers will waste time, money and talent on productions like this is one of the never answered questions of Broadway. Theodore Hammerstein and Denis Du-For were responsible for this one.

Oh, Mr. Hammerstein! Oh, Mr. Shean!

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Just "Popsy"

By BROOKS ATKINSON

SOMETHING about the sound of that title was a warning. What would a play entitled "Popsy" be like? Last evening it was produced at The Playhouse with Al Shean in the featured role, and the warning has turned into a dreadful reality. "Popsy" is one of the worst plays ever written. Man and boy, this column has not looked at its like since the days of "Boudoir."

It is an old-fashioned family comedy about an aging Professor of Mathematics who cannot take the trip he and his wife have long dreamed about because their three daughters have man trouble at the same time. But don't worry, children; everything turns out for best, you may be sure. Popsy has a heart as golden as ripe sweet corn.

Upon consulting the records it appears that Fred Herendeen is also author of "Mystery Moon" (1930) and "Orchids Preferred" (1937), which seems like yesterday. Theodore Hammerstein and Denis Du For have also produced "Broadway Interlude" (1934), "Thoroughbred" (1933), and "Howdy Stranger" (1937), Rowland G. Edwards also directed "Money Mad" (1937). These historical facts are mentioned to indicate that "Popsy" has an extensive background in folly.

The Beard was in the audience last evening, and swore it was the worst play he had ever seen. That charge requires a little mulling over. There have been some honeys in the last fifteen years, including the one that presented Clyde Wilson Harrison as its noblest character. But "Popsy" will have a distinguished niche in the archives. Life as we know it in these times is fabulous.